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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TRANSCRIPT OF DAILY BRIEFING
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1978
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

MR. RESTON: All right, ladies and gentlemen. I have a couple of statements to make.

The White House will commermorate the 30th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 12:00 noon on December 6. Several hundred representatives of non-governmental organizations active in the human rights field, as well as representatives of the civil rights movement, the labor movement and the United States Congress, will join the President on this occasion.

The National Security Adviser, Mr. Brzezinski, and the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Warren Christopher, will discuss United States human rights policy and answer questions on the policy from the audience.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10, 1948, by the United Nations. A Presidential proclamation marking this day was released to the press by the White House on November 28, and we have copies of it if you would like.

And I have another statement, if there are no questions.

Since the attack on Congressman Ryan in the tragic events at Jonestown, the Department of State has carefully examined the record of its actions with respect to the People's Temple community and the Jonestown community. A great deal of this information has been shared with the press from this podium or through direct contacts with our Guyanese Task Force. It is absolutely clear from the record that the Department of State and our Embassy at Georgetown have discharged their responsibilities fully and conscientiously within the limits placed upon the Department and the Embassy by law and basic constitutional guarantees of the right to privacy.

In fact, we believe it is safe to say that more attention has been devoted by the United States Government to this particular group of Americans living overseas over the past 18 months than to any other group of Americans living abroad.

In the course of five separate visits to Jonestown, Consular Officers checked out specific allegations of mistreatment which had been received in more than 50 cases. To my knowledge, every specific allegation attached to a specific individual which was received by the Department or the Embassy was checked by interviewing the supposed victims. In no case did the supposed victims confirm the allegations.

In addition, the Consular Officers did what they could to confirm or refute the general charges that had appeared in the press and elsewhere about conditions in Jonestown through their own observations and by consulting with their opposite numbers in Guyanese law enforcement agencies. Once again, our Consular Officers and our diplomats were unable to confirm these charges.

Do I have questions about this statement or about any press items this morning?

Q Yes. As you no doubt know, there were several specific charges made by family members and lawyers in San Francisco.

A Yes.

Q Specificallly -- do you want me to go through them?

A Would you, please?

Q O.K. One was that one Consular Officer had discouraged any further investigation and attempts to do anything about the People's Temple group. He's identified as Richard McCoy, who is alleged by Mrs. Blakey not to make her assertions of oppression and possible mass suicide public to the press. Do you want to do that one first?

A Well, let me give you the background of Mr. McCoy's dealings with Mrs. Blakey.

Mr. McCoy had two conversations with Mrs. Blakey. The first conversation was on the plane going to the United States from Guyana; and the second conversation which the two invidiauls held with each other

was several days later after their return to the United States. That conversation was on the telephone with Mr. McCoy when he was back here in Washington.

The conversation on the plane -- the first conversation -- discussed several things, and Mrs. Blakey wondered whether she should go to the press with her allegations.

Mr. McCoy's response was that he wasn't sure it would help, but it was for her to decide whether she should go to the press.

Now, during the second converation, Mrs. Blakey said that she felt she had to do something about what she knew, and she reiterated her question of whether she should go to the press with it.

Mr. McCoy responded that she should make her own decision, but he felt that at that point it wasn't going to solve anything really, since the press reports up to that date had not helped to finally resolve the issue. He strongly recommended that she contact appropriate Federal law enforcement agencies to report what she knew in hopes that they would be able to uncover corroborating evidence that could be forwarded to our Embassy in Georgetown and turned over to the Government of Guyana with an official request to investigate People's Temple activities in that country.

Q He asked her to contact Federal law enforcement agencies?

A Yes.

Q What would prevent him from contacting Federal law enforcement agencies?

A Nothing would prevent him.

Q Is that regarded as a lapse on his part?

A I really don't have an answer to that question. I have not heard that question discussed.

Q But you say in your opening statement that the Department of State and its Embassy and Consular officials fully discharged their duties. I just wonder whether that question had been raised -- that if he receved allegations of criminal misconduct in an area that is his responsibility to his country, whether he should not have gone to Federal law enforcement agencies.

A Well, I think the answer to your question is that I have not heard that question discussed.

Q Tom --

Q O.K., are you finished?

Q Wait. Can I follow up then?

A Yes.

Q O.K. Another specific allegation is that --

Q Excuse me. Just one thing, Jim: Do you have dates on those?

A No, but I'll be happy to try to get you dates.

Q On those two conversations?

A I will be happy to check and see when Mr. McCoy returned from Guyana and will see whether we can get you specific dates.

Go ahead, Jim.

Q A specific allegation, another one, is that the State Department was warned: "It would be possible for Jones to effect a mass suicide." The lawyers in this case say they simply received no reply to the warning from the State Department.

A Now, is this the affidavit you're talking about?

Q Yes, on June 15.

A Yes, this is the affidavit.

Just a minute. I'm sorry, I'm going to have to take that question. Could somebody go and see whether they could find me that? It's just not in my packet. Maybe I've got it here.

Thanks, Kate.

I don't know whether the Department responded to the lawyers who had sent us the affidavit. If we did not respond, then we are at fault for not responding.

But let me say, with regard to the affidavit, that it repeated charges which had previously been brought to our attention; but it did not provide specific information such as names, places, and other facts which might have been useful to law enforcement officials.

Mrs. Blakey had been advised by the U.S. Consul to report her information to appropriate Federal law enforcement agencies in the United States. We do not know whether she in fact did so -- whether she in fact reported her allegations -- but it is our understanding that law enforcement officials in the United States were in contact with defectors from the People's Temple community in advance of Congressman Ryan's visit.

She did in fact send her affidavit to our Embassy in Georgetown, and she sent it to the Government of Guyana. I do not know whether we responded to this particular affidavit which was sent to us. I will check that for you.

Q How come you don't know? You just haven't searched it yet or --

A I just don't know whether we did or not. I know that in the case of a letter regarding the child custody case of Mrs. Stone there was an error on the part of the State Department in that we did not respond to one particular bit of correspondence and that we are simply at fault.

Q Tom, what would be the appropriate law enforcement agency that one would report crimes being committed in Guyana to?

A Well, let me say there are a number of agencies here. For instance, I think at the Treasury Department we suggested that she get in touch with the Customs people and with the Bureau of -- I think it's Alcohol, Firearms, and Tobacco. That would be in regard to charges of gunrunning or Customs violations. And I think we also suggested the FBI and the Department of Justice.

Q Does the FBI have any jurisdiction over things that are going on in Guyana?

A Well, that would depend on the particular allegations. As a matter of law, obviously the Guyanese are in control of their own territory; but it is possible that some activities by American citizens abroad conceivably could violate United States law.

Q Tom, this may have been gone over in the past, but did you say the State Department's action, when advised of specific allegations that people were being held against their will and so on, was to send Mr. McCoy out or whoever else out to interview them in the field? If there were allegations that a crime was being committed in Guyana, should not Mr. McCoy have sent or asked the Guyanese police to send out investigators to investigate the possibility of a crime on their soil rather than try to determine on his own from his own information where a crime was being committed? Was that done?

A Well, as I believe we have said, we have discussed with the Guyanese certain aspects of what was going on at the People's Temple community. We have discussed, for instance, the child custody case and queried the Guyanese authorities as to whether that case was moving through the Guyanese courts in a timely fashion.

Q What I'm talking about is allegations of criminal conduct in Guyana -- which is out of the province, I suppose, of U.S. investigation authorities. It would seem to me that if such charges are made, the Embassy or somebody, or the Department here, should ask the Guyanese police authorities to investigate it. That's their territory. Was that done?

A I'll have to take that question.

Q Isn't Mr. McCoy here?

A Yes, Mr. McCoy is here.

Q I mean right here in the briefing room? You've taken at least three questions regarding him. Could he not possibly be brought up to answer these questions himself?

A No, that will not be possible. We have discussed that matter this morning. We have already made responsible officials of the State Department available to the press to discuss this matter, but it will not be possible to make Mr. McCoy available.

Q Why not, Tom?

Q Does he have laryngitis or --

A No, he doesn't have laryngitis. I was talking with him this morning.

Q Has he been told not to speak to the press? Was he been told not to answer press queries?

A The decision has been made that we will not make him available here in the briefing.

Q Is that his wish or yours?

A It is a decision on behalf of the State Department. There have been charges made about Mr. McCoy's activities and the carrying out of his responsibilities as a Consular Officer.

There were some earlier charges made. They were investigated, and they turned out to be without foundation. If other charges, additional charges are made, they too will be investigated. But merely because a charge appears about a Foreign Service Officer in the newspaper, that does not place upon us an obligation to produce the particular individual to submit to questioning.

We are proceeding with this matter in the most businesslike manner possible.

Q Tom, I understand that the intelligence officials have information that the People's Temple is buying off two ministers of the Guyanese Government. I'm wondering, when was this information known? Was it known to intelligence prior to this incident or has it become known since?

A Reed, I have no information about that; and, as you know, I don't discuss intelligence matters.

Q Well, if it was known to the State Department that two ministers in the Guyanese Government were being bought off, that would be a factor in the thoroughness of the kind of investigation that could be conducted, wouldn't it?

A Reed, I have nothing on it.

Yes, John.

Q Tom, I'll ask you two questions.

Do you happen to know if the letter that Congressman Ryan wrote to Secretary Vance on December 7, 1977, in which he requested that Mr. Jones' passport be lifted and that Jones be returned to the United States in compliance with a court order from the Superior Court of California -- if that letter was ever turned over to the Justice Department or to the FBI to find out if in fact there were grounds for extradition?

A I do not know. I certainly will check that question for you.

Q Then secondly, if you could: The Guyana judge, according to Ryan's aides, in the child custody case said that he dropped the case because he received death threats, assassination threats, from the Jonestown community and that that was the reason the case was never decided in Guyana.

A The judge dropped the case?

Q That's right.

A Or the judge says that he refused to make a decision in the case?

Q Well, he refused to make a decision in the case.

Can you find out if the State Department was aware of that at the time?

A I will try to find that out. I don't know whether I can, but I will try to find that out.

Q Other subjects?

Q No, the same subject.

Q Have you talked to Mr. McCoy about the charges? Apparently the San Francisco Chronicle this morning has a story saying that McCoy warned Jim Jones about -- this is from Mrs. Blakey and her two attorneys -- that McCoy warned Jones about impending visits and told him who would be interviewed; also that Jones provided women to members of the Embassy for sexual purposes and also to members of the Guyananese Government.

And one other thing I'd like to ask: Mr. Bushnell, when he was briefing us last week on this, I feel made it very clear that in all interviews with anybody from Jonestown, including two who had left, no one had ever said there were problems in Jonestown. Now, you're telling us that Mrs. Blakey did tell Mr. McCoy there were problems; and to me that's kind of a new thing.

I think you can go back to the records and verify this.

A Yes, I understand what you're saying.

First, with regard to the allegation which has been made about sexual compromise, we have previously dealt with that question from this podium, I believe.

Second -- let's see; you've got so many questions in there.

Q What was the answer to the second on compromise? I'm sorry; I wasn't here when they dealt with that. I never was aware of it.

A Well, during the initial interviews of People's Temple survivors, the Department became aware of hearsay allegations that an American Embassy official in Georgetown had been sexually compromised by a People's Temple member. The Department has investigated this particular allegation, using the sources available at that time, and has found the allegations to be without substance. The officer against whom the allegation was made has executed a sworn statement categorically denying any sexual misconduct in Georgetown. The Department of State --

Q What about in Jonestown?

A All right. Let me finish this and then I'll see whether --

Q Or intervening points. (Laughter.)

A Yes, all right. Let me see if I can clear up that question for you, but let me finish what I have to say about this.

The Department of State, as a matter of practice, follows up all possible leads in this kind of an allegation. There are still potential investigative sources, and the Department of State will follow them up as well.

Now, you had a variety of other questions which --

Q Before you leave that one, Tom, did he take a lie-box test?

A I don't know.

Q Tom, on that same thing --

A I will try to clear up the question which you raised, Reed.

Q Which is to say?

A The Georgetown question.

Q When you say the Department has investigated this, is getting the sworn statement from the individual against whom the allegation was made the only rebuttal that the Department has gotten? Or has it gotten statements from other people who were in a position to know who have rebutted that allegation?

A It is my understanding that there is more to the investigation than just simply accepting an affidavit from the individual involved or said to be involved.

Q Tom, isn't it charged that the Jonestown people recorded both audio and photographic evidence of this and has that been discovered?

A I know of no such evidence.

Now, you had some more questions.

Q Okay.

Let's go to the one where I think we have a new development here from what Mr. Bushnell was saying and what you are saying.

A Yes.

Let me make clear that what Mr. Bushnell was saying was with regard to activity which took place in Jonestown. What Mrs. Blakey --

Q No.

A It is my understanding. It is the visits of the Consular Officers of the American Embassy at Georgetown, their visits to Jonestown, which produced no corroboration of the allegations which had been made.

What happened between Mrs. Blakey and Mr. McCoy happened on the plane from Georgetown leaving Guyana and coming to the United States. It was not in the Jonestown area.

Q I think if you check the transcript -- and I would have to guess on the day, either Tuesday or Wednesday of last week -- you will find that he talked about a plane flight in which a Consular Officer was on board with a defector, and that in that flight she never mentioned anything about any problems.

A All right. I will be happy to make available the transcript to you; and if there is a contradiction between what I am saying and what Mr. Bushnell was saying, we will clear it up.

Q He talked about two defectors, one up at Matthews Ridge and one in Georgetown who was stationed in Georgetown, and that had to be Mrs. Blakey.

A If you will show me the transcript and I am contradicting what Mr. Bushnell said, we will find out who is mistaken.

Q Tom, on the original question asked, I think there was one other element of it, which was the allegations that Mr. McCoy warned Jones not only about what Mrs. Blakey had said but also about impending visits by Consular Officers and who would be interviewed in those visits?

A I will take that question.

Q Another subject?

Q No. Same subject.

Tom, on Jonestown, there is some question about how this community was supported financially. Have we now been able to discover what kind of cash crops they were producing and is there any evidence that drugs or other illegal activities were being carried on there?

A I haven't seen any evidence of drug trafficking or drug usage on behalf of these particular people.

Q What did they produce? I mean, what was found?

A Let me see if I can find out what their agricultural activity was.

Q Tom, there particularly seems to be some contradiction, I think, between whether the agricultural production of Jonestown was enough to even sustain the 900 or so people that were living there. There were some reports that it was and plus there was a surplus that they could give to the Guyanese Government or sell or whatever. And there are other reports that there wasn't.

Do you have something right now that you can say to clear that up?

A I don't have anything right now that would clear that up, but let me kind of add that to the previous question which I took -- whether we have a judgment to render on that question.

Q Tom, could I go back to the original statement?

In whose name was that read? Is that the U.S. spokesman saying the Department discharged its duties, or did the Secretary of State authorize it or the Administration, White House level?

A It is I, as the Spokesman of the Department of State making the statement, and you can assume that people at the highest levels of this Department have seen it.

Q I just wondered if that statement was drafted with or without consideration of some of the questions that were raised here today, such as whether the Guyanese police were asked to investigate or whether Mr. McCoy warned the Temple of impending visits, and so on?

A I don't know because I have not gone through every consideration which the drafter of the statement had when he drafted the statement. It is a statement on behalf of the Department.

Q Just for a clarification, at least for me.

Did you say that Mr. McCoy is in the room now?

A No. I am sorry. He is here in the Department. He is not in the room.

Q I assume you have given us all you have on this investigation of a sexual compromise allegation.

A That is right. I have.

Q Can you take a question and ask if the Department -- I mean, so far as I can tell, presumably most of the witnesses to this act would have been dead by now. Can you take a question and see if the Department can provide any other information as to why they are satisfied, if they are in fact satisfied, that this allegation is groundless?

A I am not really confident that I would be able to get you a detailed answer to that kind of a question. That would involve methods of investigation and that sort of thing, and I don't think that is something that the Department probably would wish to discuss.

Q So, you are asking us to take it on faith that you have got something besides the denial by the individual involved?

A Part of my statement was that there are other investigative sources which are still being checked with. But as of this time, or as of the time that this statement was drafted, we believe the charges to be without substance.

Q You also said that you had corroborating sources already of some kind without going into any detail, and I would just be interested in any detail you could provide.

A I understand you would. But you have to understand that I am very doubtful that the Department would wish to disclose its methods of investigation.

Q Tom, could you just take the simple question of whether or not the person involved has submitted to a lie detector examination?

A No, I don't think I'll take that question.

Q One more. The Times story said this morning, quoting I believe Mrs. Blakey, that relations between the Jonestown people and the American Embassy in Georgetown were "extremely close."

Could you confirm, deny or comment in some way on that?

A I am kind of in a quandray because I don't know what the maker of the statement means by extremely close. I did say in my statement earlier --

Q Forget about what she said. Do you have your own characterization about how the relations between the two were?

A I said earlier that it is safe to say that more attention was paid by the American Embassy to this particular group of Americans living abroad than to any other group of Americans living abroad. We did visit the community with Consular visits, as we have told you before.

I don't have a characterization of the official relations between the American Embassy at Georgetown and the People's Temple community.

Q Could you take the question of how many times Mr. McCoy spoke with Reverend Jones, roughly?

A I think we have already put out the number of times that Consular Officers went to Jonestown.

Now, I will now take the question which you asked me to and find out whether there were additional meetings, say in Georgetown, or whether there were talks over the telephone. I don't even know whether they had telephones there.

Q Tom, on the side issue about the lie detector, what did you just say -- that you didn't want to answer that question?

A No. I said I don't want to take and will not take the question about whether a lie detector was used.

Q Well, can you take the general question, which I thought had been answered last year, as to whether lie detection tests are being used in this building any more on Foreign Service Officers?

A I will check the record to see whether we have an answer to that question.

Q Well, just the general one: Are lie detector tests now being applied to FSOs or anybody else working in this building when a person's word is involved here?

A I will look at the record to see whether we have a policy on that.

Q Okay.

Q Tom, did you identify the officer who made the sworn statement?

A No.

Q You didn't say it was McCoy?

A No.

Q Wait a minute. Could I just follow that up, please?

Is there a reason for that?

A Yes.

Q Which is?

A A charge is made. We do not believe the charge is of substance, and we do not want to identify the person against whom the charge was made.

Q You may have already answered this question in a previous briefing, but what is the official position of this Government on whether or not autopsies should be performed on these 900 bodies?

A That is really a question for the Justice Department.

Q Tom, when if ever will the correspondence from the Embassy to the Department regarding Jonestown be made available to the public or the press?

A I don't know. We are working on that at the moment.

Q One other thing.

Have you found out yet what happened to the $500,000 and the note to the Soviet Embassy that was allegedly sent?

A I don't think I have anything to offer on that.

I don't know what the disposition of that is. If you want me to take that question, I will.

Q I would appreciate it if you would, yes.

A Other subjects?

Q Yes.

Tom, can you at all amplify the President's statement yesterday on what kind of assurances you have from the Soviet Government on these MIG-23s?

A No. I have nothing new to add to what the President said.